

**Idaho Fish and Game Commission
Special Meeting
March 21-23, 2005**

March 21, 2005

Workshop

The Commission workshop was called to order at 1:10 p.m. by Chairman Marcus Gibbs. Commissioners Alex Irby, Gary Power, Wayne Wright, Cameron Wheeler, Nancy Hadley, Department staff, and Jeff Allen, Policy Advisor from the Office of Species Conservation (OSC), were present. Commissioner Gibbs noted that Commissioner Watts will be attending as he is able given his duties at the legislature.

Wolf Management

Jim Unsworth, Chief, Bureau of Wildlife, explained the two approaches for the Commission to consider in seeking authority for the state to manage wolves.

One is a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that would be signed by the Director, the Commission, and the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. An MOA would allow the Department to define what the state will do under its own authority with reporting requirements to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The other approach is a Cooperative Agreement, which is less formal, and leaves the USFWS in charge of the process with the state acting as an agent/employee of the USFWS for wolf management. This agreement requires collaboration on decisions and much more frequent reporting.

While there is little difference in work on the ground, the Department and OSC prefer the MOA. It more clearly shows that Idaho is ready to assume management duties.

Commissioner Wheeler commented that the subcommittee working on the wolf management issue thinks the MOA is the best approach, and that is his personal preference as well. He feels that if the state takes as much authority as it can, the Department will be better off with hunters, legislators, and the public and it will be an advantage in preparing for delisting. Commissioners concurred that an MOA would be the best approach.

Jim Unsworth walked the Commission through the Final Experimental Population Rules and staff comments (Appendix 38, Exhibit 21) on those requiring direction from the Commission.

- Geographic Area – staff recommended accepting the experimental population rules. Wolves north of Interstate 90 are still endangered and don't fall under the 10(j) Amendment. For the time being, the state will still have to address that population separately. Jeff Allen, Policy Advisor with the Office of Species Conservation, commented that once de-listing occurs, the state will push for de-listing of the entire Idaho population.

- Interagency Coordination – the Department does not have expertise or resources to conduct Section 7 consultation. Craters of the Moon, a few wildlife refuges, and small portion of Yellowstone would fall under this rule. Jeff Allen clarified whether the MOA would ask that the Department be the designated agent or the state be the designated agent. If it is the state, then the Department of Lands would have Section 7 expertise. Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act requires that if someone engages in actions on federal lands that may impact an endangered species, they must consult with the USFWS on what the activity is, what impact it may have, and what actions will be taken to mitigate the impact. It is unlikely that the state will be granted this authority, but the Commission concurred that the MOA should request the authority but be prepared for the request to be denied.
- Additional Taking by Private Citizens – as the state takes on more authorities there will likely be more cases where the public does not feel the Department goes far enough.
- Government Take of Problem Wolves – eliminating wolves or packs. USFWS has standard protocols, and the Department will likely have similar protocols.
- Government removal, killing or translocation of wolves. USFWS would approve a plan for removal and then the Department would have authority before the fact.
- Land-use restrictions on private or Federal public lands – Commissioners agreed to request this authority with the understanding that it will likely be denied.

The Department wants to minimize the administrative hassle as much as possible. At the end of the year – want to be at a point where we can report to USFWS that we have not adversely impacted the population.

De-listing is the ultimate goal, but the MOA is the first step. Realistically, de-listing is not likely to occur soon. That enhances the necessity to get the MOA done.

Commissioner Watts joined the meeting at 1:56 p.m.

Mr. Unsworth presented an overview of the 10(j) rule and what the Department will need to do to meet the burden of proof for removing wolves due to adverse impacts on wild ungulate populations (Appendix 38, Exhibit 22). This included the science-based approach and documentation as well as a timeline for an initial document to be reviewed by USFWS.

The Director commented that this process sets the bar and demonstrates the due diligence necessary for the Department to act. The Department is taking a measured approach so that goals are realistic and attainable. The approach is basically the predator management plan that the Commission approved and is representative of management data the Department has operated on successfully.

Commissioner Watts left the meeting at 2:40 p.m.

The target is this spring to get the MOA done.

The Director commented that the Department has talked to the U.S. Forest Service forest supervisors on the issue of landing helicopters in the wilderness when necessary. Intermountain

Regional Forester Jack Troyer is working on it, and the Department is getting help from OSC. It is critical to be able to move quickly when the opportunity presents itself.

Ungulate Research Project

Pete Zager, Principal Research Biologist, provided an overview of the project, the Department's largest effort in history to capture and collar elk and deer throughout the state (Appendix 38, Exhibit 23). The objective is to determine why some deer and elk populations are thriving and others are not. The project will address the question of wolf impact to deer and elk herds. Survival rates and cause-specific mortality will be key in looking at wolf impact.

Dr. Zager explained that some view quantity and quality of habitat as the key to what drives ungulate populations. Others are convinced that population dynamics (predation, hunting, disease, and weather) are the determinants. There is probably no single factor but a combination of habitat-related and population-related factors that determine a population's trajectory and vigor. It is difficult to find definite answers because populations are a moving target – spatially and temporally variable. The time element can be addressed by following through on long-term studies. The spatial element can be addressed by scattering representative study areas across the range of variability that is Idaho. While this approach seems relatively straight-forward, the number of combinations quickly becomes overwhelming.

Since starting the research effort in February, approximately 450 ungulates have been captured, evaluated, and radio-collared. There will likely be over 600 ungulates in the study once they are finished. Survival is 100% so far among radio-collared elk and mule deer.

The next steps include:

- Looking at a subset of study areas and focusing on juvenile animals – monitoring neonates for 6 months, studying body condition, survival rates, and cause-specific mortality. Approximately 300-350 neonates have been monitored in central Idaho in the last few years, but only 2 have been taken by wolves.
- Experimental manipulation of predator populations and monitoring of ungulate population response.
- Add a backcountry study area.
- Collaborate with the University of Idaho, Taylor Ranch, and others to seek outside funding.

The Department does have some data on wolf predation in winter. If the population is healthy, it can absorb predation. If other factors are affecting the population, it may not be able to absorb the predation. One of the biggest challenges in determining mortality cause is getting to the animal within 24 hours to determine the cause with probability. This research effort will complement the Department's wolf management efforts.

Budget Discussion

Steve Barton, Assistant to the Director, led a discussion on the current and future direction of the Department budget (Appendix 38, Exhibit 24). He posed four basic questions: 1) Should estimated license expenditures not exceed estimated revenue? 2) Should the Budget

Stabilization Fund be maintained at \$3 million? 3) Should the Fleet Management Program continue? 4) What are the program priorities and areas for reductions.

If the Department's fee increase (SB1191) is approved by the Legislature, there would be a trailer appropriation bill to cover change in employee compensation and 27th payroll. The trailer bill would also replace some portion of the \$1.9 million that JFAC cut from the Department's budget. If the increase is passed as drafted, license revenue will be \$32.1 million. If it is not, license revenue will be \$29.6 million. Estimated expenditures for FY '06 will be \$32.4 million. Assuming the bill passes, the Department's cash balance will hold steady until June 30. FY '07 will benefit from no 27th payroll, and the cash balance will be trending downward, but holding fairly steady. Without a fee increase, the cash balance would take a major hit.

The Department will spend approximately \$1.5 million for equipment in December of each year on the Fleet program and will need that amount in the account.

The policy question for the Commission is whether to continue to maintain services by using the Budget Stabilization Account, Fleet Management Account, etc., or to set the budget strictly based on estimated revenue.

Commissioners concurred that it is difficult to make policy decisions without some idea of direction going forward from the Division of Financial Management and the Governor's office. They agreed that the Department needs to take a different approach to the budget. There are too many designated funds, and it is impossible to easily track revenue and expenditures.

Commissioner Wheeler proposed working with key legislators on the Department's budget issues. The Director and Chairman will work on putting together a work group including the co-chairs of JFAC and the Chairs of the Senate and House Resources Committees to discuss potential legislative fixes to address the issues.

Chairman Gibbs stated that he told the Senate Resources Committee the Department would not be back for another increase for at least two years. Even if SB1191 passes, policy decisions need to be made. The Commission agreed to meet for a workshop on the budget and spending authority once the outcome of SB1191 is known which should be the first week of April.

RULES

Public Hearing

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Marcus Gibbs at 7:02 p.m. Chairman Gibbs introduced Commissioners Hadley, Irby, Power, Watts, Wright and Wheeler, and the Director introduced the staff present. Brad Compton, Big Game Manager, provided an overview of the big game regulations being considered by the Commission at the week's meetings.

Keith Lawrence, Director of the Wildlife program for the Nez Perce Tribe, commented on the ungulate research project and its importance in determining the relationship between predators and ungulate populations. He reminded the Commission of Senator Crapo's Elk Collaborative which focuses on habitat restoration and asked Commissioners to continue to support habitat

restoration (including burning in the backcountry) and the call for these efforts to be built into the forest planning process in the Clearwater.

Jay Hamilton, representing Hamilton Outfitters in Southeast Idaho, commented on extending the deer season into the controlled elk hunt season in the Southeast Region. He stated that he saw a major increase in deer in the northeast corner of units 76 and 66A when the deer hunt was closed down. He recommended not overlapping the deer season with the controlled rifle elk hunt.

Bill Keys from Boise presented a proposal for the Commission's consideration to help the Access Yes! program and increase hunter satisfaction. He commented that elk hunters are sometimes prevented from hunting by bad weather, illness, or other extenuating circumstances. He asked the Commission to consider having two zones for an elk hunter to select from, and they would buy a second full-priced tag. A hunter could kill only one elk but would have the opportunity to go on another hunt if he or she could not take advantage of the first hunt. He commented that this would bring in close to \$1 million for programs such as Access Yes! and increase hunter satisfaction.

Thomas Judge, representing the Idaho State Bowhunters, commented on the 39-3 controlled archery hunt in the Boise foothills. He commented that this hunt has been a well-kept secret. The Bowhunters have been working with Region 3 on last year's changes. They would like the Commission to consider creating a buffer zone that vehicles could use for parking to prevent vehicles from parking on the highway and entrances to subdivisions. Mr. Judge also referenced a letter their Region 2 Director submitted requesting 25 permits for an early archery controlled bull elk hunt in Unit 18 and 10 tags for a bull draw only hunt in Unit 11. He also commented on the sportsmen's caucus that has recently been formed to represent about 15,000 sportsmen who will have a collective voice now at the Statehouse.

Dick Nachbar from Caldwell commended the Commission for considering splitting Unit 39 for elk management into the high country and the foothills. The information presented at the Nampa open house suggested that the high-country boundary would be drawn on the Sawtooth wilderness boundary. Problems also exist on the Trinities, Rattlesnake Mountain, Sheep Mountain, and other high peaks in that area. He hoped the Commission would consider this in splitting the unit into the high country and the foothills.

Steve Imlay of Sagle, Idaho, spoke on behalf of those who are disabled and have trouble getting a disabled hunting and fishing license. He feels the requirement that an individual be on SSI or SSDI to get a disabled license is very poor. It is frustrating to have to obtain a doctor's certification of disability every year when the Idaho Transportation Department can recognize a permanent disability on a driver's license. He also would like the Commission to address the limited options on where disabled licenses can be purchased. He asked the Commission to address these issues and help the handicapped in Idaho.

Nate Helm, Executive Director of Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife (SFW) Idaho, thanked the Commission for its continued commitment to the Mule Deer Initiative, for addressing bonus and preference points, and for readdressing management issues. SFW is working to adjust to its growing membership in Idaho and is committed to improving communication and transparency. SFW is creating subcommittees to address mule deer, upland birds, and other issues/programs of importance to the organization. SFW emphasizes efforts at the local level. Local projects to highlight the Treasure Valley include a large group of subdivisions who want to do wetlands

work in cooperation with the Department and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS). SFW members in Twin Falls are working on the Bell Rapids project. The Lost River chapter is working on the Timber Dome Ranch. SFW is also excited about the aspen project in Eastern Idaho. Mr. Helm stated that SFW supports either adding days on the beginning or end of backcountry bear hunts to provide an opportunity that can benefit ungulate herds.

Chuck Middleton, of Idaho FNAWS, spoke on bear hunting. Friends in the Outfitters and Guides Association have asked for their support to include baiting bears in the backcountry before the season opens. Idaho FNAWS is lending its support. This proposal will improve the opportunity for harvest for the first week with clients. He has seen many bears in the backcountry.

John Jobe of Meridian commented on the Unit 39 bull elk season. He stated he has hunted the area for many years. He favors moving the opening back to October 15. Weather conditions make it difficult. He also supports splitting Unit 39 if that makes sense.

Travis Bullock spoke as an individual regarding the bear season. Calf crops and bull:cow ratios are down. A University of Idaho study shows late summer calf crops at 30%. There are a lot of bears, but hunters need more time to bait for the bears before elk season opens. Mr. Bullock also commented that he hasn't heard any complaint about the white-tailed deer tag. He is involved in the Challis area Chamber of Commerce and stated that anything the Commission can do to get a salmon season there would be great for the local economy. He invited the Commission to Challis for their annual steelhead dinner on April 9.

Trent Bullock, an outfitter on the South Fork of the Salmon river in the Middle Fork zone expressed his support for bear baiting opportunity before elk season opens.

George Peter spoke in favor of splitting Unit 39. He agreed with Dick Nachbar that the Unit should include more of the backcountry than just the wilderness. He offered to give his suggestion on a boundary to staff. Mr. Peter favors allowing bear baiting for backcountry starting one week earlier.

Commissioner Watts asked Mr. Peter about the Southwest Region opening for deer hunting on October 5 while the rest of state opens on October 10. Mr. Peter had no problem with that. Commissioner Watts asked Chuck Middleton who preferred a uniform date. Tom Judge was fine with an October 5th opening for the Southwest Region.

Derek Batson commented on the preference/bonus point issue. He believes Idaho needs a system, and noted that almost every other Western state has a system in place. A system would address the fairness issue. It would also increase revenue because license buyers will buy just for the points. And, it would be proactive. He commented that instead of going to a true bonus point system, the Department should look at other states and perhaps create a hybrid system. Mr. Batson also suggested the Department work on a system with license buyers who buy licenses in other states that have points and who understand the issues. He feels the youth opportunity can be addressed with special youth hunts. He stated that due to populations and deer numbers, the state may have to go to draw for everything someday. Mr. Batson feels that any system is better than no system. Commissioner Watts asked Mr. Batson about the idea of an October 5th opening date for deer hunting in the Southwest Regions. Mr. Batson stated he didn't understand the

reasons behind it. He commented that a uniform opening date is preferable as it helps in enforcement and planning.

Commissioner Watts asked Nate Helm for his preference regarding October 5 or 10 for the Southwest Region deer season. Mr. Helm stated that as an organization, SFW has pushed for more uniformity and consistency.

Dale Bradburn, spoke in support of a point system. He has been putting in for over 18 years in Idaho for antelope and has never drawn. He has sons who have been putting in for 4 years for the bear hunt by Council, but he has known someone who has drawn 3 times. He puts in for hunts in other states to get the points. He believes a point system would bring in more revenue for the Department. He also commented he would like to see fewer doe hunts.

Grant Simonds, IOGA, stated that the proposal to change the October general mule deer season dates in Regions 4, 5, 6, and 7 will cause economic harm to several outfitters. In Region 7 some outfitters had already booked deer hunts for the first week in October. In the past, the Commission and Department gave the outfitter industry a year's notice of such changes. Mr. Simonds asked if the Department/Commission will refund licenses and tags to those hunters who have booked the first week in October. He also spoke in support of adding an extra week to the bear season in the Middle Fork. IOGA does not feel that an earlier bear season would interfere with summer floaters on the Middle Fork. Mr. Simonds also commented that when the elk season was moved to November several years ago it eliminated outfitters' late season hunt in the wilderness country of Unit 39. He encouraged Region 3 to involve outfitters in discussions on solutions to the Unit 39 issue. Mr. Simonds commented that IOGA has urged the Idaho Congressional delegation to apply pressure to NOAA fisheries to get permits for a Salmon season in the Salmon area if the numbers justify it. Mr. Simonds shared a letter from an outfitter in Southeast Idaho relative to the muzzleloader hunt with some suggestions. He also mentioned that the IOGA has joined the Sportsmen's Caucus that has recently formed under leadership of the Safari Club and mentioned the Caucus' opposition to HB174 to add moose and deer to domestic cervid farms. Mr. Simonds stated that the light turnout for the public meeting was likely due to it being spring break week and encouraged the Commission to avoid spring break week when scheduling the March meeting.

Thomas Judge, expressed concern about shifting the season to October 10 and asked if it is a general shift of the whole season or trimming 5 days off the rifle season. The bowhunters doesn't want rifle hunters to lose days, the bowhunters don't want to lose days, and they don't want to close the gap between the two seasons. Brad Compton stated that the Department has no recommendation for a change to the general deer season in the Southwest Region currently.

Bob Minter, Ada County Fish and Game League, spoke on shifting the season opening date in Southwest Idaho. Currently deer season opens October 5 and elk season opens October 15 currently. He commented that now there will be a general tag, there is potential to have hunters hitting two openings if the Southwest Idaho date was shifted. He observed that opening dates were set up to disperse hunters across the state. He would like to see a consistent opening date for deer across the state.

Commissioner Watts commented that according to the draft regulations, Region 3 is not changing its opening dates for deer season, but the rest of the state is changing its date. Moving the date to October 5 for the Southwest Region would be status quo.

Chairman Gibbs thanked those who attended. The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

March 22, 2005

The Commission meeting convened at 8:03 a.m. with Commissioners Gibbs, Hadley, Wheeler, Wright, Power, and Irby present and Deputy Director Terry Mansfield serving as Commission Secretary. Commissioner Watts was absent

MISCELLANEOUS

Opening Comments

Commissioners discussed establishing a regular schedule of conference calls during future Legislative sessions so they stay informed and have an opportunity to discuss the Department and Commission's position on legislation.

Agenda Changes

Item #18a. was added to discuss the FY '06 budget and trailer bill, and Item #10a. was added to discuss Landowner Appreciation Permits. There will be an Executive Session to discuss legal and personnel issues.

Review of Public Comment

Chairman Gibbs noted that the majority of comments were on changes in Unit 39. There were comments on preference points and increasing bear baiting in the backcountry and an earlier bear hunting season. He also noted that a discussion of disabled hunter permits will be covered as Agenda Item #22 and mentioned the reminder on the habitat component in the Clearwater.

The Director's Report was postponed until the Director could join the meeting.

Commission Reports

Panhandle Region. Commissioner Hadley reported that the Region held good meetings on the hunting seasons. Snow pack in the mountains is 30% of normal, and it has been the driest winter she has ever seen. The Region needs a wet spring and summer. The Region will be participating more in the K&K fishing derby on Pend Oreille Lake. This is one of the bigger events and will have \$30,000 in prize money in addition to ticket proceeds to try to increase lake trout take. Trapnetting to do population surveys will also be done. Although there was good egg take for kokanee this year, the biomass did not look very good.

Upper Snake Region. Commissioner Wheeler reported that from Regional Supervisor Bob Saban's standpoint, the meetings on the big game hunting season were the most positive they had ever seen. The Region has made a conscious effort to tell people what is going on and where things are heading. The lion symposium a couple of years ago was good and helped people see

lions in a different manner. The Department has a program in place, and people have bought into it. Staff has done an excellent job communicating with people. There is a lot of hard work going on with the Mule Deer Initiative and positive things from that are spreading across the Region. The Region saw interesting results on the fish flush on the South Fork. There is some reduction in rainbows. The bad news is the cutthroat are dropping in numbers as well. This can be attributed to low water and the cutthroats are stream spawners. Commissioner Wheeler has seen a drop in negative phone calls from constituents. Most are positive and constructive criticism. The Region deserves a lot of credit. They have had controversy in the past, but there has been a lot of progress.

Magic Valley Region. Commissioner Wright reported that the Region is doing well and recognized Regional Supervisor Dave Parrish for his efforts. Drought conditions are severe in the Region, with snowpacks about 60% of average in the Big Wood area. River flows may be at an all-time low, which affects range conditions. Lack of snow kept the staff from doing good aerial counts especially in the Wood River area. The fawn:doe and buck:doe ratios look good North of the Snake. South of the Snake is increasing on the west side, but eastern side doesn't look as good. The Region collared 25 fawns in January in the South Hills with 3 mortalities due to predators. Fawns were good sized. They also captured 30 does in Unit 45, who weren't in as good a shape as expected. Despite lack of snow, mountain lion and cougar hunters have done well. Ice fishing was confined to Salmon Dam and Magic Dam. Salmon Dam Fishery is a bright spot in the Region, and the catch ratio is at an all-time high. Sage grouse look good, and the strut has started. The Region has been collaring some of the males, and the numbers look good. The Jerome building is on schedule and will be done the first part of June. The Region would like to have the building dedication at the November meeting.

Salmon Region. Commissioner Power reported that mule deer fawns were 20 pounds heavier than normal this year due to rains last summer. Deer trends (buck:doe ratios) in all the areas except one are above minimums. Fawn ratios are fair but not excellent. Elk numbers were above objectives in almost all the units. Unit 28, which has experienced issues with wolf and lion predation and fires has been up and done but is at an all-time high right now. During the surveys, the crews made visual contact on two packs of wolves North of Salmon River. They were able to get colors; these are not part of collared or counted packs. It would have been good to have had clearance to land in the wilderness to collar these packs. The Department really needs to push for that. Also while doing the elk survey, they got a photo of a wolverine, and the Region is getting more reports of wolverine. The Region also identified a new bald eagle territory. Snowpack in the Salmon basin is approximately 45% of average. That has limited some of the cooperative work between BLM, FS, volunteers, and the Department on trying to document numbers of pygmy rabbits, which are a species of concern. They are finding populations. These are areas where populations were suspected but not confirmed. The Region's public meetings on the hunting season went well. The Region put a response sheet in the newspaper, and they made fliers for vendors. They had over 100 comment sheets turned in, which was a good response rate.

Clearwater Region. Commissioner Irby reported that the Myrtle Community is looking forward to a new access site. The staff have worked very hard with the County Commissioners on this effort. White-tailed deer management and loss of the Clearwater tag remains a hot topic. After a

year or two and with standardization of seasons, there will be more acceptance. Friends of Deyo Reservoir out of Weippe are working with Clearwater County economic development staff to secure funding for a design plan, which is an essential step to pursuit of construction funding. Steelhead fishing is still good around Orofino, averaging around 10 hours per fish. They are waiting for salmon fishing.

The Region's public meetings seeking angler comments for the 2005 salmon season received good response. Weather conditions have been mild, but it looks like Dworshak will fill this year. The snowpack percentage continues to increase due to good water retention in draws and where ice packs have frozen. With approval of the Snake River Basin Adjudication, they should be able to keep water longer in the reservoir. The NRA magazine, recently featured the Jack O'Connor Hunter Heritage and Education Center. July 1, there will be a dedication ceremony at the Center. Region 2 staff is working on sponsoring the hunting panel for the exhibit. Staff is working hard.

Southeast Region. Chairman Gibbs reported that in mid-February Regional Supervisor Dexter Pitman announced his retirement effective mid-May. The Department is in the process of finding a replacement. The Bear River basin snowpack is about 90% on the Idaho side. The level in Bear Lake is low and is causing a problem for spawning of Bear Lake cutthroat trying to get from the lake to St. Charles Creek to spawn. There is a proposal on the agenda to address that. Snowpack in that area has also caused problems with deer feeding, and they are now seeing fawn die off near feeding sites. The older deer are doing okay on the feed supplement, but the fawns are seeing extensive mortality. Meetings on big game seasons were well attended. Two issues of concern were the general lion season and the elimination of the late black powder hunt. The late black powder hunt is proposed to be eliminated due to buck:doe ratios, which are below objectives. Restrictions in Units 73 and 70 helped restore ratios to more acceptable ratios. The Region will continue that for at least 3 years to see what happens. The Region has continued to inform sportsmen on how and when restrictions can be eased. The Pocatello Chapter of Pheasants Forever has been doing a lot of habitat work. They had 4 projects last year and have 10 planned for this year. Some have been very successful, and they have had editors from magazines write articles that will be out in the near future.

Terry Mansfield, Deputy Director, noted that there will be an open house on Friday, May 6, in Dexter Pitman's honor. He also noted that staff would like to coordinate dedication ceremonies for the new regional offices with the Foundation and Commissioners.

CONSENT CALENDAR

05-16 Commissioner Hadley moved and Commissioner Power seconded a motion TO ADOPT THE ITEMS IN THE CONSENT CALENDAR including the Financial Report and the minutes of the January 2005 Commission meeting. The motion passed in a unanimous vote.

REPORTS

Surplus Regional Office Facilities

Terry Mansfield explained that the Department must have Commission approval to meet a Public Works requirement to add the current Jerome and Lewiston office sites to the State's surplus list. Steve Barton, Assistant to the Director, explained that the Department is looking at moving one of the mobile buildings in Lewiston to the Boise area. On Friday, April 22, at 3:30 there will be a dedication ceremony for the new building in Salmon, and Commissioners are invited. The Jerome Region is on schedule for an early June move-in, and Lewiston is targeting move-in for July 1. The Foundation Board would like to work with the Commission on dedication dates for those two offices. The August Foundation meeting is on the 19th and 20th, and the November meeting will be held on the 11th and 12th.

05-17 Commissioner Wright moved and Commissioner Irby seconded a motion TO ADD THE EXISTING JEROME OFFICE TO THE STATE SURPLUS LIST. Commissioner Wright withdrew his motion.

05-18 Commissioner Wright moved and Commissioner Irby seconded a motion TO ADD BOTH THE EXISTING JEROME AND LEWISTON OFFICE SITES AND EXISTING BUILDINGS NO LONGER REQUIRED BY THE DEPARTMENT TO THE STATE SURPLUS LIST. The motion carried unanimously.

Anything that may be useful to the Department will be removed before the sale.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Huffaker reported that he signed a candidate conservation agreement with assurances with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the Southern Idaho ground squirrel. This gives private landowners protection under the ESA in the event the species is listed. Private landowners can voluntarily subscribe, and the agreement describes what landowners can do. If they enroll their property and the Southern Idaho ground squirrel is listed, they will already be covered. USFWS, the BLM, and the Department have taken a leadership role on doing conservation outside the ESA listing process. Idaho is on the cutting edge of how to do these agreements and work with landowners.

The Director recommended that the Commission formalize a process for the next legislative session to ensure that Commissioners get information on legislation and take a position when necessary that all have agreed upon.

Commissioner Gibbs asked about the brucellosis conference call referenced in the January minutes. The Director reported that the Governor of Wyoming appointed a task force, and one recommendation was an experimental trap and slaughter operation on one of Wyoming's feed grounds. The January conference call was to share information on that situation. Jim Unsworth reported that Wyoming has moved forward on the Pinedale herd and has moved up to 10% of the elk. The elk are put in a truck, which is sealed, and the elk are taken to a facility in Rigby for slaughter. Wyoming is looking at Idaho's model at Rainey Creek as an option for ongoing management.

Commissioner Wheeler mentioned that he has gotten questions from staff on how long the Department's Rainey Creek operation would continue. Mr. Unsworth explained that the objective is to get brucellosis in that herd back to normal levels, which in normal herds, is 5% or

less. The goal is to reduce the incidence of brucellosis and disperse the elk whenever possible so they are not being fed all the time. The Department has a herd that is almost self-sufficient. Efforts have been working and have reduced the incidence of brucellosis to about 10%. The Department has built almost 50 fence structures and has made good progress with landowners. The Department foresees this efforts as long-term. If the rate could be maintained below 5% for several years, the Department could scale back efforts.

REPORTS

Legislative Update

Steve Barton, Assistant to the Director, presented an overview of legislation relevant to the Department (Appendix 38, Exhibit 25). The Department's legislation has gone through the legislative process. The fee bill is up for amendment and will be scheduled in the Senate. The bills on wolf management were passed.

Commissioner Wheeler commented that the Commission needs to have a strategy on setting priorities regarding legislation. He proposed resurrecting the legislative committee to review and discuss the legislation with staff and then involve the rest of the Commission.

Mule Deer Initiative

Brad Compton, Wildlife Game Manager, reported on the Department's efforts to enhance mule deer in Idaho. For the past year, the Department has been working on a plan. Mr. Compton presented an overview of the Action Plan including habitat management actions, population management, predator management, access management, enforcement, and public involvement (Appendix 38, Exhibit 26). The Department will be working to get public support and commitment for the Plan.

Mr. Compton provided a copy of the Draft Action plan (Appendix 38, Exhibit 27) which will also be available on the Department's web site. All Department employees will receive information and training on the Mule Deer Initiative (MDI) at this May's in-service training session.

Commissioner Power commented that Nevada has done a lot of work on rehabilitation of old mining pits that have become excellent mule deer range. Mr. Compton added that several companies in southeast Idaho have made efforts at replanting.

Commissioner Wright asked if the Department will be looking at Native American impact on mule deer mortality. Mr. Compton stated that Enforcement staff document Native American harvest whenever they encounter it. There is nothing in the Action plan that calls for collaring and monitoring adult bucks. Commissioner Wright would like to see it addressed as some people in Region 4 see it as a significant problem.

Commissioner Irby inquired about range conditions in southeast Idaho and if federal agencies are working with the Department on that issue. Mr. Compton indicated the Department has been

working with federal land partners on cheatgrass; however, there is no “fix” for the problem. There are efforts on a juniper encroachment project.

Commissioner Watts joined the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

Mandatory Harvest Report

Bruce Ackerman, Wildlife Statistician, provided information on the harvest reports for 2004 (Appendix 38, Exhibit 28). Hunters are required to report within 10 days after harvest or at the end of the season. They can report by mail, fax, phone, or website. The response rate for 2004 was approximately 79% as of March. Surveys were sent to 90,000 hunters, and the Department does a follow-up phone survey for those who do not respond.

Overall hunter success rate for 2004 was down slightly at 36%. Elk harvest was up slightly as were the number of elk hunters. Success rate was down slightly at 20%. Antelope harvest was about the same at 1,300 and hunter numbers were up slightly. Success rate was down for the year at about 67%. Deer and elk harvest were up slightly for 2004 and antelope harvest was about the same.

The Mandatory Harvest Reporting system works well, has a strong response rate, provides detailed data, and offers several choices of reporting methods. It is very complex and can be improved by improving incoming data through use of the website. Efforts to improve the process include providing confirmation, reducing invalid and missing data, incentives for reporting early, and preventing tag purchases for non-respondents.

RULES

Big Game Seasons

Brad Compton provided an overview of state big game populations. White-tailed deer are doing fine, and there have been increases in mature bucks. Mule deer populations are increasing in most areas of the state. There is a high survival rate on radio-collared fawns, and the Department has seen improvements in buck:doe ratios in many parts of the state. There is still concern for deer populations in Units 75, 77, and 78 where populations are well below objectives. Elk harvest has increased significantly and populations are relatively stable. Aerial surveys this winter have indicated a population increase, although there have been some decreases in certain areas (Lemhi and Pahsimeroi). Black bears are showing signs of over harvest in the southeast corner of the state, but for the most part, populations are meeting or exceeding management objectives. Mountain lion populations have come down from their peak in the mid 1990s with hunters currently harvesting about 500 cats. The Department has seen declines in depredation and incidental take.

A summary of potential changes for 2005 big game seasons was provided to Commissioners (Appendix 38, Exhibit 29) with their agenda materials.

Mr. Compton went over the significant changes in recommendations for the deer season. The goal of the Department and the Commission is to simplify rules. The 2005 recommendations

reflect a significant movement to standardize seasons. Commissioners discussed specific changes to the proposed rules.

Commissioners discussed how open houses are conducted and Commissioner Watts suggested more coordination so the public knows how their Region fits into the overall picture. Commissioner Power commented that the Department did a good job of putting the information out in the paper, radio ads, fliers, and at vendors.

Commissioner Watts broached the subject of what to do for people who may have already booked a hunting trip with an outfitter based on an October 5 opening date. The Chairman pointed out that the application states that seasons are not yet set. Commissioner Power commented that the Department should work with outfitters. The Director stated that if an outfitter can't accommodate clients on another date, they should contact the Director, and he will authorize a refund of the license and tag fees.

05-19 Commissioner Watts moved and Commissioner Irby seconded a motion TO ADOPT BY PROCLAMATION CHANGES TO RULES GOVERNING THE TAKING OF DEER AS PRESENTED WITH CHANGES AS NOTED (APPENDIX 38, EXHIBIT 30). THE TEMPORARY RULES WILL BE IN EFFECT UNTIL APPROVED AS PERMANENT RULES BY THE LEGISLATURE. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Compton reviewed staff recommendations for the 2005 Fall and 2006 Spring Black Bear Seasons. The only change recommended is shortening the season in eastern and southeastern Idaho in response to over-harvest.

Commissioners discussed a change to allow bear baiting one week earlier in the wilderness units. Bear baiting is a separate chapter in IDAPA, and the Department did not notify the Governor or the public that a change in bear baiting was being considered. Dallas Burkhalter can notify the Governor's office that the Commission wants to change the rules and the Commission can formally take the action before it is effective. The Commission discussed moving the bear season to start one week earlier instead adjusting the baiting dates.

05-20 Commissioner Watts moved and Commissioner Wheeler seconded a motion TO ADOPT AS A TEMPORARY RULE ALLOWING PLACEMENT OF BAITS ONE WEEK PRIOR TO THE START OF THE FALL BEAR HUNTING SEASON IN BACK COUNTRY UNITS 17, 19, 20, 20A, 26 AND 27 IN THE SELWAY AND MIDDLE FORK ZONES. BEAR BAITS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO BE PLACED STARTING AUGUST 23. BEARS COULD NOT BE HARVESTED OVER THESE BAITS UNTIL THE OPENING OF THE TAKE SEASON ON AUGUST 30. THIS IS CONTINGENT ON THE DIRECTOR GETTING PROPER APPROVAL FOR THE COMMISSION TO TAKE THE ACTION. THE TEMPORARY RULE WILL BE IN EFFECT UNTIL APPROVED AS A PERMANENT RULE BY THE LEGISLATURE. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

The meeting recessed at 12:25 p.m. and resumed at 1:38 p.m. Commissioner Watts was absent.

Mr. Compton continued with a review of recommendations for the 2005 Pronghorn Antelope Season. The only recommendation is a slight reduction in permits in Unit 36B.

05-21 Commissioner Power moved and Commissioner Irby seconded a motion TO ADOPT BY PROCLAMATION CHANGES TO RULES GOVERNING THE TAKING OF PRONGHORN ANTELOPE AS PRESENTED (APPENDIX 38, EXHIBIT 31). THE TEMPORARY RULES WILL BE IN EFFECT UNTIL APPROVED AS PERMANENT RULES BY THE LEGISLATURE. The motion carried unanimously.

05-22 Commissioner Hadley moved and Commission Wheeler seconded a motion TO ADOPT BY PROCLAMATION CHANGES TO RULES GOVERNING THE TAKING OF BLACK BEARS AS PRESENTED (APPENDIX 38, EXHIBIT 32). THE TEMPORARY RULES WILL BE IN EFFECT UNTIL APPROVED AS PERMANENT RULES BY THE LEGISLATURE. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

Mr. Compton presented staff recommendations on the 2005-2006 Mountain Lion season. Changes are to line up season closing dates in the Panhandle and to align with the bobcat season. Staff also recommended increasing the quota in Units 46 and 47. The quota is typically reached, and the Region feels there are adequate numbers to offer more opportunity. Recommendation was also to eliminate quotas within the Mule Deer Initiative (MDI) emphasis area. The goal is to maintain or reduce mountain lions while MDI is ongoing. Region 5 is comfortable with this recommendation.

Chairman Gibbs has met with hound hunters in Region 5 and indicated that if the take was reaching levels harmful to the population, the Director could close the season. Commissioner Wheeler commented that he met with houndsmen in Region 6 who have agreed with the change but want the Department to justify the higher quotas in about two years.

05-23 Commissioner Wheeler moved and Commissioner Power seconded a motion TO ADOPT BY PROCLAMATION CHANGES TO RULES GOVERNING THE TAKING OF MOUNTAIN LIONS (APPENDIX 38, EXHIBIT 33). THE TEMPORARY RULES WILL BE IN EFFECT UNTIL APPROVED AS PERMANENT RULES BY THE LEGISLATURE. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

Mr. Compton reviewed the changes recommended for the 2005 general elk seasons and controlled elk hunts. There are relatively minor changes in the Panhandle and in Southeast Idaho to address the elk management zones that are agricultural and can't tolerate a lot of elk, but where there is concern about quality. Changes also emphasize minimizing elk occupancy of critical mule deer habitat.

Commissioners discussed outfitter allocation. Mr. Compton explained that there must be a proportionate change to outfitter allocated hunt permits for any change in the number of permits for a controlled hunt. Historic use numbers can be the basis for outfitter allocation, but historic use is to establish initial allocations and is not meant to be used ongoing. The actual rule stipulates that the change result in a proportionate number of tags being designated for outfitters. There are three methods to determine outfitter allocation: Historic use, a sliding scale, or 0.

05-24 Commissioner Wright moved and Commissioner Wheeler seconded a motion TO TABLE COMMISSION ACTION ON ELK SEASON RECOMMENDATIONS UNTIL COMMISSIONER WATTS IS PRESENT BUT BEFORE ADJOURNMENT. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

Landowner Appreciation Permits

Mr. Compton presented changes to Landowner Appreciation Program (LAP) permits. The Commission is required to set permit levels for LAP. Changes to LAP are proportional to changes in existing controlled hunts. Only landowners who are qualified, registered and eligible to apply can apply for leftover permits. The landowner can use them or designate them.

Chairman Gibbs commented that LAP permits should go to landowners affected by elk depredation problems. The Regional office should have leftover permits for people who have land in the Region impacted by the elk. Mr. Compton indicated that under current rule, the only people eligible for leftover LAP tags would be registered and eligible LAP landowners. Emergency depredation hunts could resolve the problem. After January 1, the Region would use emergency depredation hunts with 50% of depredation hunt permits going to landowners, who can use them personally or designate to another individual.

05-25 Commissioner Irby moved and Commissioner Wright seconded a motion TO ADOPT BY PROCLAMATION CHANGES TO RULES GOVERNING LANDOWNER APPRECIATION PERMITS AS PROPOSED (APPENDIX 38, EXHIBIT 34). THE TEMPORARY RULES WILL BE IN EFFECT UNTIL APPROVED AS PERMANENT RULES BY THE LEGISLATURE. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

Mr. Compton gave a brief update on the Department's discussions with the Fish and Game Advisory Committee regarding the Landowner Appreciation Program. The Department discussed unresolved issues with them, including the issue of small landowners not being rewarded, large landowners being treated the same as smaller landowners, and the sale of LAP tags. The Advisory Committee has a "straw man" they are considering to resolve all 3 issues. It is difficult, as sportsmen want to see some gains for sportsmen and Agriculture wants to see gains for Agriculture. There is no consensus yet, but the Committee is aware that without a recommendation from them, the Commission will take action.

Commissioners agreed to request that the Advisory Committee provide a recommendation at the May Commission meeting. If they aren't making progress, the Commission will take action. Dallas Burkhalter, Deputy Attorney General, will have rules available for action at the May meeting.

Wolf MOA Update

Staff recommended and the Commission agreed that the Department should request all of the 16 wolf management authorities the Department discussed in the March 21 workshop.

05-26 Commissioner Wheeler moved and Commissioner Wright seconded a motion TO HAVE THE DIRECTOR, THE DEPARTMENT, LEGAL COUNSEL AND THE OFFICE OF SPECIES CONSERVATION WORK TOGETHER TO DRAFT THE MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT REQUESTING THE 16 AUTHORITIES FOR WOLF MANAGEMENT AND ALLOW THE COMMISSION TO REVIEW THE MOA AS IT MOVES FORWARD. The motion carried unanimously.

Jeff Allen with OSC relayed that there is a tentative conference call on Thursday at 11:00 a.m. with Chris Smith from Montana on building a basis for support of de-listing. Idaho would like to use the state boundaries for de-listing rather than the Distinct Population Segment (DPS) boundaries. Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin are all asking for smaller DPS for de-listing. Idaho is starting those discussions with Montana. Idaho would like to get the agreement in place before wolves make it over the Cascades.

Mr. Allen also commented that Senator Crapo has been given permission to take the lead on Endangered Species Act (ESA) reform even though he has moved to the Finance and Appropriations Committee from Environment and Public Works. Greg Schildwachter will be the Senator's point man on ESA reform.

The MOA on wolf management with the Nez Perce Tribe has been drafted and agreed to, but the Governor won't sign that MOA until the Snake River Basin Adjudication agreement is signed. That is expected to happen on Thursday of this week.

St. Charles Creek Temporary Rule Change

Mark Gamblin, State Fishery Manager, presented staff and Region 5 recommendations to replace the existing special regulation for St. Charles Creek with a regulation that will allow a general bag limit of all trout species. St. Charles Creek is the primary Bonneville cutthroat spawning production tributary for the Bear Lake population. The Region is working with local communities to reconnect the tributary and working with irrigators on tributary enhancement projects as part of the Department's conservation plans for Bonneville cutthroat.

05-27 Commissioner Irby moved and Commissioner Wheeler seconded a motion TO ADOPT AS TEMPORARY RULES STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS TO REPLACE THE TROUT CATCH & RELEASE RULE WITH THE GENERAL FISHING RULE FOR TROUT AND TO REMOVE THE NO BAIT, BARBLESS RESTRICTIONS FOR ALL OF ST. CHARLES CREEK AND TRIBUTARIES. ALSO TO MAINTAIN THE JULY 1 OPENING DATE ON ST. CHARLES CREEK DOWNSTREAM OF THE CARIBOU NATIONAL FOREST BOUNDARY AND THE GENERAL STREAM SEASON DATES UPSTREAM OF THIS POINT. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

The July 1 opener would protect spawning Bonneville cutthroat in the stream. This change anticipates that the Region and landowners will be able to restore connectivity to get fish from St. Charles Creek to Bear Lake during key periods of time.

Preference Points

Brad Compton provided an overview of Department work toward developing a bonus or preference points system (Appendix 38, Exhibit 35).

The "straw man" being developed deals with high demand deer and elk controlled hunts in an effort to improve drawing odds. This option would require tag/permit fees to be paid with the application; it would limit applicants to single species; and it would implement a two-year waiting period. Mr. Compton commented that while the straw man offers some solutions, there

is no perfect system. A bonus points system is staff's preference mainly because it provides reasonable opportunity for new applicants. Next steps include getting the Commission's endorsement and cost estimates, as well as conducting public scoping and preparing legislation. Potential implementation would be April 2006 at the earliest.

Discussion included the expected increase in non-resident applications. Director Huffaker commented that the Department fee increase bill introduced in the House was amended to add a provision for approval of a bonus point system with a maximum \$6 cost. This was a contentious issue, and the bill was sent to an amending order. Director Huffaker will get minutes of that hearing to the Commissioners. Senator Cameron felt that it was a state policy issue that should be decided by the Legislature. It will be important to make sure the Legislature and the public knows exactly what is being proposing and how it will be financed.

Commissioners endorsed pursuing a bonus point squared system similar to Nevada's system.

05-28 Commissioner Wright moved and Commissioner Power seconded a motion TO ENDORSE THE TIMELINE PRESENTED BY STAFF AND TO DIRECT STAFF TO PROCEED WITH A BONUS POINTS SQUARED SYSTEM. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

MISCELLANEOUS

Executive Session

05-29 Commissioner Irby moved and Commissioner Hadley seconded TO HOLD AN EXECUTIVE SESSION PURSUANT TO IDAHO CODE 67-2345(1) (b) (c) and (f) TO DISCUSS PERSONNEL, LAND ACQUISITION, AND LEGAL MATTERS. The motion carried unanimously.

The Session began at 4:25 p.m. and ended at 7:10 p.m. No action was taken.

March 23, 2005

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Gibbs at 8:10 a.m. with all Commissioners present.

RULES

Big Game Season

Commissioners took up the discussion of staff recommendations for 2005 elk seasons. Commissioner Watts indicated he worked with regional staff to create a new controlled hunt in a sub-unit of Unit 39 to provide an earlier season. The issue is that hunters cannot get into the back country with the later season. Input at the public meeting for Region 3 showed 2 to 1 support for this change.

The proposed change would create a new controlled bull hunt in Unit 39 from October 1 to October 9 with 25 tags available, or another number that staff feels is biologically justifiable. Mr. Compton indicated that the staff recommendation is no change this year until research is done.

Commissioner Watts also suggested changes in controlled antlerless muzzleloader elk hunts in the McCall zone. Mr. Compton commented that there is no biological issue, but this change has not been scoped with the public in the McCall zone.

05-30 Commissioner Hadley and Commissioner Watts seconded a motion moved TO ADOPT BY PROCLAMATION CHANGES TO RULES GOVERNING THE TAKING OF ELK WITH CHANGES NOTED (APPENDIX 38, EXHIBIT 36). THE TEMPORARY RULES WILL BE IN EFFECT UNTIL APPROVED AS PERMANENT RULES BY THE LEGISLATURE. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

Commissioner Wheeler asked for information on outfitter allocations and previous Commission decisions on outfitter allocation.

REPORTS

Sterile Hatchery Fish Research and Management

Dan Schill, Fisheries Research Manager and Jeff Dillon, Regional Fishery Manager, gave an overview of the Department's sterile fish research and management program (Appendix 38, Exhibit 37).

Dan Schill summarized research that was the basis for the sterile hatchery trout program in Idaho.

The objective was to protect native species and preserve harvest opportunity for sportsmen. These goals were achieved with sterile triploid trout, which are easily produced. Research was conducted in lowland lakes and reservoirs as well as mountain lakes. The program was implemented statewide in 2002.

Jeff Dillon presented information on how the Department developed THE "recipe" or procedure to treat eggs at spawning to produce sterile triploids. Development costs are low, minimal staff time is required, and equipment is produced in-house. A new technology is being developed and tested to provide more consistent/higher sterility rates and better survival. Unless fertile fish are specifically requested, all hatchery rainbow trout stocked throughout state are sterile fish. Sterile trout are a low-cost method to address demand for harvest opportunity as well as genetic risk to native fish.

Sport Fish Restoration Award

Dan Schill recognized the following staff:

Jeff Dillon, who originated the Idaho sterile trout program and designed the first evaluation studies.

Rick Alsager, the first hatchery manager to raise sterile fish in the state.

Bob Eselman, who managed the Hayspur Hatchery and was involved in initial research and initial mass production efforts.

Tom Frew, resident hatchery manager, responsible for statewide implementation.

Dave Tuescher, who completed the field evaluations and perfected the recipe for heat shocking to produce large quantities of sterile eggs.

Doug Marster, utility craftsmen, who built shock-o-matics.

Doug Megargle, who designed the first high-lake experiments and conducted the first pressure treatments.

Joe Kozfkay, current hatchery trout researcher, who perfected pressure recipes and was the first biologist in the world to successfully sterilize lake trout.

Brad Dredge, current Hayspur Hatchery manager, who is responsible for continuing the current program and future implementation of the pressure technique at production scale.

Mr. Schill introduced representatives of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) -- Phil Durocher, Director of Inland Fisheries, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; and Gary Saul, Deputy Director of Inland Fisheries, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and President-elect of the Fisheries Administrators Section of the AFS.

Deputy Director Saul presented the Society's annual award for sport fish restoration to the Department's sterile fish research and management team. The award is intended to highlight the importance of the program and recognize the research. Idaho is the first state to implement such a program on a broad scale, and the AFS is building on the Department's work.

Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon Run Status and Update

Sharon Kiefer, Anadromous Fish Manager, presented an update on the spring/summer Chinook salmon run (Appendix 38, Exhibit 38). At this point, the forecast of the number of adult fish to cross Lower Granite Dam suggests harvest opportunity, but it is too early to predict the run. Staff are watching the situation closely, but it has been a slow start thus far.

Spring Chinook Season Proposals

Sharon Kiefer presented the 2005 Spring Chinook "Early" Season Fisheries Proposal for Rulemaking (Appendix 38, Exhibit 39). The early season fisheries are generally the Clearwater, Lower Salmon, Little Salmon, and the Snake Rivers. Based on jack counts and expectations, the Bureau has high confidence in initiating fisheries even though it is early. However, they have lesser confidence in the magnitude and duration for the season and will need updated run size to determine those. This year, there are mixed signals for the Clearwater drainage, with only 6% of jacks returning from smolts released. The Bureau should have a clearer picture in mid-May. Dworshak and Rapid River hatcheries have large numbers of PIT tags sufficient to use the return at Bonneville for early season projections.

Response at public meetings in the Clearwater Region indicated support to spread the harvest opportunity throughout the Clearwater Drainage. The Department believes run size monitoring will allow us to manage.

Ms. Kiefer detailed the changes in opening and closing dates, fishing hours, limits, boundaries, methods of take, and Clearwater Special Restrictions (changes are indicated with arrows on 2004 Seasons & Rules in Exhibit 39).

The Department will propose rulemaking in May for a Summer Chinook extension if the run size circumstances support a proposal.

05-31 Commissioner Watts moved and Commissioner Irby seconded TO ADOPT AS TEMPORARY RULES THE STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS ON CHINOOK SALMON SEASONS THAT INITIATE IN APRIL AND TO DIRECT STAFF TO CONTINUE MONITORING SPRING/SUMMER CHINOOK RUNS AND GET PUBLIC REVIEW AND INPUT ON THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK FOR THE UPPER SALMON CHINOOK SALMON FISHERIES. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Kiefer reviewed the framework for a 2005 Upper Salmon River Spring and Summer Chinook Season (Appendix 38, Exhibit 40). The information provided was informational, as staff are not ready to present recommendations.

The Upper Salmon is a mixed composite of ESA-listed, naturally produced and hatchery produced runs. Last year's pre-season forecast indicated a harvestable surplus of hatchery salmon, but the Department was not able to get past the procedural hurdles to offer a season last year and forecasts dropped in mid-season. The Department has continued to develop a procedural framework to offer a season when the biology supports it for the stretch of river upstream of the Lemhi. The Department plans to manage the total mainstem Snake and Salmon River ESA-permit "take" to ensure there is an Upper Salmon River fishing opportunity. Staff is likely to have a proposal in mid-May when more run-size information is available. Staff does have a pre-season prediction of harvestable hatchery fish. Staff will pursue getting feedback from the public and local communities regarding a Upper Salmon River salmon season

Commissioner Power acknowledged staff's excellent effort on the framework. Ms. Kiefer acknowledged the staff and the policy leaders of NOAA Fisheries in working with the Department on the framework. The Department is expecting a permit from NOAA Fisheries for a season on the Upper Salmon River that provides an agreed upon biological framework for the Department to move ahead with an opportunity. At this point, it is up to the fish, and the Department needs to see the run size coming in as projected; the Department will be monitoring the situation carefully.

FY '07 Budget Direction

Steve Barton provided a list of trailer bill options for the FY '06 budget (Appendix 38, Exhibit 41). Assuming the fee increase legislation passes, the Department will need to provide direction to the Legislative Budget Office on where to allocate the additional funds.

The Commission discussed whether to cut some of the fee increase priorities, cut funding from existing programs to fund new priority programs, or fund a percentage of all programs.

Commissioners directed the Department to propose a trailer bill that fully funds the regional office leases, funds the priorities as much as possible, and restores base operations to the extent possible.

Department can put together a proposed trailer bill that addresses the priorities.

The April 4 meeting will include a discussion on FY '06 budget issues and direction for the FY '07 budget.

Hunter Education Ring Award

Dave Parrish, Regional Supervisor, presented a gold Sheepshead Logo Ring to Howard McCuistion from Jerome, Idaho. Mr. McCuistion has been an active hunter education instructor in Region 4 for 20 years and has also taught hunter education in the Southeast and Upper Snake Regions. He has instructed 24 hunter education classes since January 1985. This year he reached the highest Instructor Service Incentive Award level of 35,000 points based on his service to the Hunter Education Program. Chairman Gibbs presented Mr. McCuistion with a

large Limited Edition “Continuing the Heritage” print. In addition to teaching hunter education, Mr. McCuistion has assisted the Department with elk capture, checkstations, and other volunteer activities.

Hunter Information System Demonstration

Brent Thomas, GIS Analyst, and Bart Butterfield, GIS Manager, provided an overview of the Idaho Fish and Wildlife Information System (IFWIS) and the new GameGuide web site (Appendix 38, Exhibit 42).

The System had its roots in StreamNet to collect data from biologists and put it in a common format. Over time, the effort has diversified and added other funding sources. The vision is a comprehensive information system for data on fish and wildlife in Idaho. IFWIS offers many benefits such as keeping data secure and accurate, increasing efficiency, and improving access to data. The system is all linked to GIS (geographic information system) and new tools such as the hunter information system (HIS) are being developed through IFWIS. Partner agencies include the Forest Service, BLM, Bonneville Power, and others.

HIS provides a web-based site for all hunting opportunities, fees/permits required, regulations, maps/directions, hunt statistics, outfitters, camping/lodging information, weather information, and other content a sportsmen might need. The advantages include providing a one-stop shop for hunting information, reducing time spent for hunters and the Department, and providing information 24/7. The site will be the first exposure especially for non-residents.

The site is still in development and is not yet linked from the Department’s web page but should be up within a month. The site can be accessed currently at fishandgame.idaho.gov/ifwis/gameguide.

Commissioners commented that it is an impressive system and it will be a major benefit to the sportsmen and the Department. Jim Unsworth acknowledged Bart and Brent for their work on the system, and commented that they are also looking at adding fishing information as well.

Preference Points

Jim Unsworth provided a recap of the Preference Points discussion at Monday’s workshop. He indicated that the soonest people can start accumulating points would be in the 2006 season.

Qualification for Disabled Hunter License

Steve Barton provided history on the current Department criteria for granting a disabled hunting license (Appendix 38, Exhibit 43). In 1998, the State Independent Living Council and the Idaho Wildlife Federation (IWF) recommended requiring a doctor certification form and proof of meeting Social Security criteria for disability. The law was changed to be more equitable and provide a standard definition of disability and employment. There was also a change in the distribution method, and while some vendors were willing to process the paperwork, many were not.

The main issues include accessibility of licenses, as there are places in the state where no vendors will issue disabled licenses, determination of disability, and the need to re-certify each year. The Department receives considerable feedback from people who are disabled but don't qualify to receive SSI or SSDI and still want a disabled license. Those with permanent disabilities do not want to be required to provide a doctor's certification each year.

Commissioner Watts commented that there was legislation drafted this year which would have removed any qualification. The bill's sponsors agreed to hold off and give the Commission an opportunity to find a solution. Mr. Barton stated that there is disagreement in the disabled community about whether they should get the disabled license discount regardless of SSI or SSDI qualification. It is difficult to determine disability or mandate physicians to determine disability for the Department. The Department went with the SSI and SSDI determination due to conflict with the medical community on how to determine disability.

Commissioner Watts volunteered to work with staff, key legislators, and disabled advocates to look at existing disability criteria and qualification and explore alternatives to the current SSI and SSDI criteria. Kelly Buckland with the State Independent Living Council has agreed to sit in on the working group, and Commissioner Wright suggested including a representative from the Idaho Medical Association.

Chairman Gibbs recognized Steve Imlay, who commented on the lack of information about accessing roads behind closed gates. He also stated that financial means should not be an issue and suggested that different levels of disability might be a solution. Mr. Imlay also commented that there is too much paperwork involved. Applicants must provide a piece of paper proving they are on SSI or SSDI.

Commissioner Wright provided some information on the different classifications of disability. The Social Security Administration has different criteria, and there are even different criteria for other agencies such as Health and Welfare.

The subcommittee will provide an update at the July meeting and present recommendations by November.

Highway Effects on Wildlife

Gregg Servheen, Natural Resources Bureau Program Coordinator, presented information on the status and trends of Idaho's roads and highways, highway impacts, avoiding and mitigating highway impacts, and the Department's partnership with the Idaho Transportation Department (Appendix 38, Exhibit 44).

The increasing number of vehicles traveling Idaho has lead to a significant increase in road, bridge, and highway construction. The trend to put more habitat under asphalt has resulted in elimination of big game winter ranges, wetlands, and breeding areas and a loss of recreational opportunity in the state.

The impacts of this trend can be summarized into 3 categories: Footprint – actual land affected by the construction of roads and highways; traffic – disturbance, noise, pollution, risk, mortality

from the number and speed of vehicles on the road; and barrier/fragmentation – the effect of the road and/or traffic in dividing, splitting, cutting up habitats, population, public access, and hunting and fishing recreation. Road development also impacts Idaho's native plants. There are significant impacts to public safety as well with more than 100 people killed and more than 1 million collisions estimated each year on US highways mostly due to deer-vehicle collisions.

Fragmentation due to roads and highways might negatively impact fish and wildlife recreation such as sportsmen access and different kinds of recreation, hunting, and fishing opportunities. An example of fragmentation is fish passage blocked by construction design. This can have huge impacts by reducing total available habitat, blocking important spawning and rearing areas, preventing genetic exchange, and increasing population risk of extinction. In many cases, the initial fragmentation and barriers caused by the road and highway construction are small in comparison to the development facilitated by road and highway improvements.

In addition to fragmentation and risk of extinction, highway development results in loss of access, loss of recreational opportunity, and loss of harvest for sportsmen, viewers, and wildlife recreationists.

The Department can address the impacts of highway development by trying to avoid impacts through planning and assessment, implementing best management practices, mitigating unavoidable impacts, and restoring impacted areas. The Department is working with the Department of Transportation as the fish and wildlife consultant on highway projects.

MISCELLANEOUS

The Commission set the budget meeting for 9:00 a.m. on Monday, April 4.

Chairman Gibbs asked if Commissioners had any feedback on the guidelines for salary vouchers. There were no concerns or questions. Commissioner Wheeler passed on a request from a disabled hunter who wants permission to drive to his favorite hunting spot. The Director indicated the Department is meeting with the Forest Service to try to find places where the disabled can drive behind gates.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.